

COSMOPOLITAN CHRONICLE

True tales from the annals of history, archaeology, construction, and restoration of the Casa de Bandini and Cosmopolitan Hotel.
Old Town San Diego State Historic Park

VOL. I. No. 24

SAN DIEGO, ALTA CALIFORNIA, AUGUST 22, 2008

PRICE: FREE

Casa de Bandini, The Movie. Part I

WILLIAM F. MENNELL
San Diego Coast District
District Services Manager

Congratulations! You have just been hired as the director of an historic era movie about the small Mexican town of San Diego in Alta California. You have just assembled your team of writers, historic consultants, set-makers, costume-creators, prop-makers, casting director, and film crews.

At the first meeting with the writers and consultants, you tell them good and bad news. The good news is that there is no book, so no fights with authors. The bad news is the historical consultants inform us no written documentation of any kind about the actual construction can be found. In this case, script writers will have to rely almost completely on the tools, materials, and techniques known from the period, and on the recently-discovered archaeological findings excavated during the restoration of the Casa de Bandini/Cosmopolitan Hotel.

A short time later, the script writers and historic consultants produce the following rough-out:

Time: Summer, 1828

Location: San Diego in Alta California

Setting: Large construction sites of Casa de Bandini and Casa de Estudillo.

Scene I: Indians and presidial soldiers are mixing mud in pits located between the two construction sites. To some pits they add chopped straw prepared by workers nearby. Six laborers are making bricks with wooden forms. One helper for each brick maker shovels the mud/straw mix into the forms. They use forms that make two 12" x 13" x 3" bricks each. Behind them long rows of adobe bricks dry in the sun. Four men are going down the rows turning bricks to dry the opposite side. In other mud pits, workers prepare the mud without straw for mortar, which is immediately transported to the walls by still more of the work crew. Dried bricks are also being moved to the walls. Cowhide bound wooden scaffolding is being erected against two walls which are now over 4 feet high, set

on cobble footings.

As the writers and consultants move to rough out another scene, you take the draft to your set makers, costume-creators, prop-makers, and casting director. Naturally, they have a lot of questions.

Casting director: "OK, lots of men working. How many are actually working on the buildings, laying bricks? How many are moving bricks and mortar? Any idea on a total in this scene? Are the owners around? Is there a foreman pointing at stuff? How old are these guys? Is there a water boy, or girl? Any women working?"

Set-maker: "I am no adobe expert, but doesn't it take water to make mud? Where are they getting the water? How many other buildings are there in town?"

Prop-maker: "How many bricks are we talking about? I figure they are using some kind of a cart or wagon to move the bricks, but how are they moving the mud?"

Costume-creator: "Are these guys wearing shoes, sandals, bare footed? Are they all wearing shirts? Hats?"

Good questions. With limited information, you knew this job wasn't going to be easy.

